

Section Three – First Day and Local Culture

http://exchanges.state.gov/media/youth/audio/nsli_111309_alumni_3.mp3

Esmay Devra West:

My name is Esmay Devra West and I'm from Baltimore. I went to Kazan, Russia.

Narrator:

Every student that goes overseas comes back with stories of what it's really like to live in Russia, China, Egypt, or any of the NSLI-Y countries. The first day is always the toughest.

Esmay Devra West:

Obviously I didn't get any sleep on the plane because it was uncomfortable. So I got to Kazan in the morning. I hadn't slept for like the past 24 hours and then I had to meet my host family, and it was really scary because I was really intimidated by being in a place where I don't really speak the language and there are new people and I have to like live with them and make a good impression and everything. I had no idea really what to expect.

Margaret Mullins:

I remember showing up, I was very, very tired, kind of confused, really had no idea what to expect and it was really hot, really crowded, very dusty, and really alive. I remember we landed late at night and we're driving through the city at 2:00 in the morning. You would have thought that it was noon, or rush hour, or something. The streets were full of people, it was gridlock traffic. The city was alive and it was 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and I remember thinking "I don't know what I'm doing, I just left Georgia, what's going on!" And it was something totally different than anything I had ever experienced.

Narrator:

Before long, the students find that the program offers a routine that they are soon familiar with. The routine and support from the program provides the opportunities to spend time with host families and experience local life.

Esmay Devra West:

After that first day, I had a pretty easy time. Right now, at this point in my life, I'm like looking for more independence so it was kind of exactly what I wanted. Another thing that helped me a lot was that I had a couple people on the trip that I knew from school and so we could act as like a support system for each other, and I made a really good friend there on the trip and she was from America, it wasn't someone that I already knew. Just knowing that I had those two people from my school going into it was a big confidence boost.

Tim Hampshire:

It took me about a third of the time to actually get adjusted. The shopping experience is insane. The first time we went to like a big, like shopping center, I thought it was going to be kind of a mall. It was not a mall. I was like a giant building, and there were sort of corridors throughout this whole building and many floors and just tiny little compartments of like stuff. And you had to go in there. And they'll just grab you. You can't browse in China was one of my most shocking things; you can't browse things. You walk into a place where things are for sale, people will accost you, and grab you, try to convince you to buy things. It was crazy. It took a little while to get used to souvenir buying, because it was hard.

Hoogakker:

I didn't actually stay with a host family the whole time. We stayed at a summer camp Nadezhda, it means "hope" in Russian, I'm not sure what it is in Tajik. We started at the camp actually, and we had short-term home stays of like five days, four days. We had class every day at the camp and we kind of went on excursions.

Matt Thorp:

The person who I had the most contact with was my host mother. She was amazing because she would talk with me whenever I wanted to and she was always there for me. Just communication is just hard to get together and definitely my mom was just so great.

Sarah Runkle:

I know some people kind of think of China as a strict, severe country. I know of course that I didn't get a full picture, but I felt some of the stereotypes people I knew had about China; I kind of broke through those, and I was able to go back and explain to them that, like certain things weren't true.

(music fade out)